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DEPARTMENT FOR AF/W-DBANKS
INR/AA-BGRAVES, AF/EPS, EB

E.O.12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: LIBERIA: LEGISLATURE DELAYS RECESS TO ADDRESS CRUCIAL
LEGISLATION

REF: A) MONROVIA 1043
B) MONROVIA 1036
C) MONROVIA 655
D) MONROVIA 599

¶1. SUMMARY: The Liberian National Legislature has delayed its annual "agricultural break" by one month, to September 30, at the request of the President in order to deliberate several bills introduced at the end of the regular session. Bills before the Senate include acts to create a Legislative Budget Office, an Anti-Corruption Bureau, a Governance Commission (ref A), a National Transit Authority, a National Economic Empowerment Development Trust Fund (ref A) and the Assets Seizure Act. The Senate is also in the process of vetting newly appointed cabinet ministers (ref B). The Legislature is expected to begin its next regular session on the second working Monday of 2008, January 14. END SUMMARY.

¶2. The act establishing the Legislative Budget Office (LBO) appears to be a watered-down version of the Financial Autonomy Act previously vetoed by the President on constitutional grounds (ref C, D). The LBO Act seeks to create an office to provide professional and technical services to members of the Legislature to enhance their capacity and capability to evaluate budget issues. The LBO would assist the Budget and Finance Committees of the Senate and House of Representatives by conducting analysis of the national budget proposal of the President and preparing reports for the consideration of the Legislature on an annual basis.

¶3. The Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) act would establish a permanent entity to lead the fight against corruption. The ACB would carry out preliminary investigations into alleged corrupt practices by officials and hand over findings to the Ministry of Justice for prosecution. The establishment of an ACB is a benchmark of the Staff Monitored Program of the International Monetary Fund.

¶4. The National Transit Authority Act (NTA) would replace the Monrovia Transit Authority (MTA) which provided a subsidized public transport system to the people of Monrovia and, to some extent, rural Liberia. The new NTA act would seek to create a public transport system that would serve all parts of Liberia.

¶5. COMMENT: The decision by the Legislature to delay its recess is necessary and welcome. The leadership struggle within the Legislature paralyzed the body for the first half of the year and the body is struggling to make up for lost time. Indeed, one month may not be enough to consider the important bills only now reaching the floor of the House. END COMMENT

¶6. BACKGROUND: Under President Samuel Doe, legislators passed a law in 1986 that entitled them to a three-month annual recess, dubbed the "agricultural break," from August to October. Under President Charles Taylor, the break was extended by another three months, from July to January. The original idea was to allow lawmakers time to tend to farms and encourage their constituents to cultivate in furtherance of the "Green Revolution" program launched

by Doe. In practice, most lawmakers usually remain in Monrovia. The 2007 break was initially delayed as a result of the 2007/2008 budget debate and there have been calls from the Executive Branch to permanently reduce the legislative break to three months.

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